

Employment First means that having a job in the community should be what we expect and plan for people with developmental, intellectual, and other disabilities. It is a national movement and many states have changed their policies, services, and systems to align with Employment First principles. The Idaho Employment First Consortium has adopted this Employment First Message and Values:

**“All Idahoans with disabilities
have the right and responsibility to work
and contribute to their community.”**

A Positive Vision for Idaho

- All communities expect people with disabilities to work
- Everyone can work and there is work for everyone
- Full employment results in higher quality of life and strong economy for Idaho
- People have equal opportunity for meaningful work and career growth;
 - ...they are supported and accommodated in the workplace;
 - ...they are empowered to contribute to their community and the community values that contribution;
 - ...they have the opportunity for advancement, responsibility, and a fair/equal wage; and
 - ...they have the opportunity, training, and support to realize financial self-sufficiency

Right now in Idaho 68% of working-age adults (16-64) are employed compared to only 26% of working-age adults who have an intellectual disability.¹ Only 41% of students who receive special education services are enrolled in post-secondary education or competitively employed one year after leaving high school.² Many people with disabilities who want to work are not able to for various reasons including public and employer misperception about the talents and skills of people who have disabilities and what they can bring to enhance their business.

1. StateData.info: The National Report on Employment Services and Outcomes 2012

2. Idaho Dept. of Education 2013 Post School Outcomes census survey

The Idaho Employment First Consortium was established in April 2012 and is supported by the Idaho Council on Developmental Disabilities for the purpose of improving how employment services and systems work in Idaho so that people with developmental disabilities are able to reach their career goals. It includes representatives from state agencies, advocacy organizations, service providers, parents, and self-advocates.

Key Objectives:

- Increase the number of individuals with developmental disabilities working in community employment
- Increase the number of employers hiring individuals with disabilities
- The state of Idaho will officially adopt and support, through policies and funding, an Employment First philosophy
- Increase the employment rate of young adults with disabilities completing high school
- Increase in the number of individuals using work incentives
- Increase in the number of employers creating internships and mentorships

Many **strategies** will be used to achieve these outcomes some of which include:

- Create or re-align policies that support individual funding and the provision of services that support integrated community employment
- Expand the array of services available under Idaho Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) waiver structure.
- Identify data collection needs and improve processes as needed
- Educate the community
- Provide training on best practice for supporting community employment
- Build awareness with employers on the value of a diverse workforce
- Ensure employment goals are included in transition planning for youth
- Implement or enhance customized employment practices
- Promote self-employment opportunities

We will be sharing reports and recommendations with our state legislature for policy improvement and will continue to work with agency administrators, service providers, schools, families, and most importantly, employers and individuals with disabilities, so more people are able to work at local businesses, earn a living wage, and contribute to their communities.

Accomplishments:

Policymaker Awareness: Consortium members collaborated to host Idaho's first annual *Take Your Legislator to Work* event in fall of 2013. Vocational Rehabilitation staff and local Community Rehabilitation Providers supported clients who invited a legislator to their workplace to find out about their job, meet their employer, and learn about individuals with disabilities who are successfully employed in community businesses.

State Law Change: passage of House Bill 476 in the 2014 legislative session enables individuals with developmental disabilities to request additional Medicaid budget dollars to pay for services to obtain or maintain employment. Medicaid Community Supported Employment services currently consist only of job coaching. This law change will positively affect the waitlist for the state-only funded Extended Employment Services program that provide long term support funding for vocational rehabilitation clients.

In addition, passage of the law required the development of training materials for service coordinators, plan developers, vocational rehabilitation staff, and others to understand the new process. The training includes information about changes to the Individual Service Plan template and requires a conversation about employment with every client and their person-centered planning team.

Recommendations for Expansion of Medicaid Services to Support Employment: the Consortium developed a list of services to be added to a new adult developmental disability services package under development by a larger state collaborative workgroup planning for system improvements. Recommendations were submitted to the group for consideration in the service package and as CMS funding authority is determined.

Review of Vocational Rehabilitation System Eligibility and Assessment Process: The Consortium identified issues related to current practice in implementation of the state vocational rehabilitation application, eligibility, and assessment process. Vocational Rehabilitation staff provided presentations about the process and the group made recommendations for improvement.

Research on Employment Funding and Policy: The Idaho Council on Developmental Disabilities partnered with the State Independent Living Council to fund research on state employment policy and funding structures. The DD Council contracted with the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston to conduct the research. The two-phase report from ICI includes recommendations that the Consortium is folding into its strategic plan for policy development and systems improvement activities.

Two initial goals are the development of a state employment outcome data collection system and building awareness about the capabilities of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities as workers. The Consortium is utilizing the ELC community of practice and technical assistance to advance work on several objectives related to these goals.

Idaho Employment First Consortium Members

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More information about the Idaho Council on Developmental Disabilities' Employment First Initiative can be found on the Council's website at:

<http://www.icdd.idaho.gov/projects/employment%20first.html>

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